

Are the self-esteem and the adult attachment affected by previous experiences of youth victimization?

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Introduction:

Youth Trauma Victimization

Traumatic situations that the child or adolescent experienced as a result of abuse or neglect [1].

Self-Esteem

Positive/negative attitude of the individual towards oneself [2].

Attachment

A process by which the individual establishes a close relationship with a significant person [3].



- ❖ Some researches show the impact of the traumatic experiences of emotional abuse during childhood in an insecure attachment style [4], leading to a negative attitude towards oneself and towards others [1]. Studies also show that child abuse is a significant predictor of low self-esteem in adulthood [5].
- ❖ The main objective of the current study was to analyze the relationship between the youth victimization trauma, the self-esteem in adulthood and the adult attachment.

Materials and Methods:

Participants:

The sample comprised 109 Portuguese participants:

- Between 18 and 68 years old ($M = 33.96$, $SD = 13.97$),
- The majority was female ($n = 82$, 77.4%).

Measures:

- Sociodemographic questionnaire;
- Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-SF) [6];
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) [7];
- Adult Attachment Scale-R (AAS-R) [8].

Procedure:

- Were inserted the questionnaires in Google Docs.
- The link to complete the questionnaires was disseminated.
- The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

- **CTQ-SF:** Comprised of 5 subscales: Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Physical Neglect, and Emotional Neglect. It is also composed of the Minimization/Denial Index [6].
- **RSES:** Evaluates self-esteem. Higher endpoint means higher levels of self-esteem [7].
- **AAS-R:** Evaluates attachment in adults. Composed of 3 dimensions: Anxiety, Close and Depend [8].

Results:

Table 1

Correlations between Childhood Trauma, Self-Esteem, and Attachment ($n = 109$).

	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Total CTQ	.826**	.732**	.701**	.817**	.763**	-.640**	-.161	-.096	.198*	-.259**	-.183
2. Emotional Abuse	-----	.558**	.493**	.626**	.490**	-.606**	-.233*	.002	.349**	-.266**	-.249*
3. Emotional Neglect		-----	.238*	.430**	.660**	-.842**	-.201*	-.119	.174	-.346**	-.107
4. Sexual Abuse			-----	.659**	.364**	-.324**	-.026	-.125	.065	-.145	-.136
5. Physical Abuse				-----	.517**	-.420**	.029	.027	.049	-.045	.007
6. Physical Neglect					-----	-.599**	-.235*	-.130	.158	-.244*	-.185
7. Minimization/Denial						-----	.260**	.071	-.256**	.369**	.135
8. Self-Esteem							-----	-.015	-.590**	.511**	.354**
9. Attachment								-----	.369**	.477**	.445**
10. Anxiety									-----	-.409**	-.519**
11. Close										-----	.362**
12. Depend											-----

Note. * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$

Conclusion and Discussion:

- ❖ In this research, emotional abuse was correlated significantly and negatively, with self-esteem, as in the study by Brodski and Hutz [1]. There was also a positive correlation between emotional abuse and attachment anxiety, which is in line with the results of Muller and colleagues in 2010. That study reported that 76% of adults who experienced emotional abuse during childhood developed an insecure attachment in adulthood [1].
- ❖ Some authors have found that some specific types of child abuse such as emotional neglect predict a low level of self-esteem [9]. The results of our study are corroborated by this research, showing a negative correlation between emotional neglect and self-esteem.
- ❖ Our research highlights the relationship between experiences of youth victimization and the increase of attachment anxiety in adulthood, decreased self-esteem, comfort with proximity and confidence in others concerning the attachment in adults.
- ❖ Some studies pointed out that child trauma victimization affects attachment styles in the love relationship [2]. The insecure attachment styles are negatively associated with self-esteem [1], and also, most of the problems related to traumatic events are significantly associated with low self-esteem [10].
- ❖ Further studies with a larger sample are recommended to evaluate those variables.